8: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1951) 1971 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

fresh meat and a surplus that could be preserved for consumption through the hard winter months when intense cold and heavy snows might make hunting impossible. If corraling proved a failure it meant short rations. Should exhaustion of food reserves coincide with winter storms the band went hungry. If there was no break in the weather they starved.

Through the dead of winter the Blackfoot bands pitched their lodges among the trees in sheltered valleys offering maximum protection from winds and snow. It would have been suicidal for them to have remained in the open country for extended periods at that treacherous season. In stormy weather they huddled close to their campfires, which they fed with wood from near-by trees. But when the skies cleared they scoured the wooded areas for buffalo or smaller game, or they ventured out into the open country to kill buffalo that had bogged down in snowdrifts or fallen into ravines. On these short hunting trips they probably traveled on snowshoes. In late winter and early spring, when the supply of fresh meat was low, the Blackfoot hunters, alone or in small groups, stalked the buffalo. By approaching under a wolfskin or buffalo robe disguise while cleverly mimicking the actions of the animal they represented, they could get near enough to the wary buffalo to rise and make their kill with bow and arrow at close range.

When the snows melted and the ice in the rivers began to break up, the period of the winter camp came to an end. Joyfully, the Indians took down their lodges, packed their belongings, and once again journeyed over the grasslands on their co-operative, warm-weather hunts.

So long as there was buffalo available, these Indians needed no other meat. Buffalo flesh, with its rich, gamy taste, was both delicious and nourishing. This big-game animal furnished a host of other useful materials. Dressed cowskins sewn together with sinew of the same animal served for lodge covers. The heavy winter hides, covered with thick, shaggy hair, were wrapped around the body, hair side in, to make warm, snug overcoats. They also served for bedding. From winter hides they also made

8: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1951) 1971 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

part in this work. Lodge covers were replaced at least every other year. Rather than discard its old cover a wealthy family might give it to a poor woman who would cut several feet off the bottom and convert it into a tipi for her family.

In the fall of the year women cut new tipi poles of lodgepole pine. After a woman had brought her poles into camp she made berry soup and invited young men who wished to help peel these poles to a feast. To remove the bark from a pole, a man secured a stick on the sharp end of his knife, grasped the stick with one hand and the knife handle with the other, and employed the knife as a draw shave.

Women painted geometric designs on the buffalo-skin draft screens which lined the lower portions of their conical lodges. The distinctive decoration on Blackfoot linings consisted of a narrow horizontal band near the top with broader bands extending downward at intervals of about fifteen inches.

Blackfoot Indian beds were simply made of dried grass or rawhide spread on the ground and covered with buffalo robes. Women displayed their craftsmanship in making and decorating the backrests set up at the head and foot of each bed. Some 125 or more peeled willow rods were tied together with sinew cord one above the other to form a flexible, comfortable, A-shaped seat back. The backrest was usually edged with red or blue trade cloth, and a flap of the same material tastefully decorated with porcupine quills or beadwork was suspended from the top. A pole tripod supported the backrest, and these poles, too, might be decorated by peeling off sections of bark in geometric patterns with a sharp knife and filling in the peeled areas with paint. It is doubtful that these picturesque house furnishings were known in prehistoric times.

Even though trade cloth was much used in Blackfoot clothing in the mid-nineteenth century, traditional styles of basic garments persisted. Some men did wear hooded coats made from Hudson's Bay blankets, copied from those worn by French-Canadian fur traders. And some members of both sexes preferred the trade blanket to the buffalo robe for their cold-weather

752 824 278 757 It was a styptic on wounds and boiled with Psoralea esculenta to treat coughs. The infusion of the fungus was taken to stop diarrhea and treat dysentery.

Populus tremuloides

534 824 Whistles were made by loosening the bark of a branch replacing it and blowing through it. Another type of whistle was made by blowing through the moistened leaves.

824 [291] Potentilla anserina

The runners of the plant were used to fix leggings in place. The leggings were tied above the knee and then folded over to the ankle, like a [284] boot. Girls used the runners to tie blankets. Though the runners did not hold their strength long, they were easily replaced.

Potentilla fruticosa

The plant, a small bush, was called "deer seat" because the animals were often found resting in clearings where the plant was common.

● [513] Pillows were sometimes filled with the leaves.

Prunus virginiana

[352] [796] [252] The straight branches were used in making back-rests (Fig. 36). The hard wood, which did not burn easily, was used in making incense tongs (Fig. 37) and roasting skewers.

Psoralea esculenta

[301] Pieces of the root were dried and attached to clothing and robes as ornamentation and medicine. Sometimes this root was scraped and used to replace the pieces of Polyporus which was attached to "Weasel-robes".

Ribes aureum

186 522 The Sarsi Indians were a constant source of humor to the Blackfoot. Because they were Beaver Indians who were in the midst of adopting a plains

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 120]

[Motokiks Society Dance, 1905]

some person lays hold of them and leads them to a seat. Two of the snake bonnets run around in the reverse way. The four bulls come in last and walk slowly around until pulled into their seats. 575 796

Like the horns and other societies the members sell, or transfer to others, usually all transferring at the same time. The ceremony seems to require four days and nights, during which time they are not supposed to sleep. . . . It is said that the entire night is given to hilarity. Joke and jest reign supreme. Some dress like men and act out the part, give orders to a wife, etc. Some roll up blankets like medicine bundles and hold mock ceremonies. . . . 575 796 432 [513] [522]

. The fees for buying a membership are a horse, a gun, and other property. The most expensive place is that of the tipi pole owner for which twelve horses and a proportionate amount of other property are required. [424] [435]

Shortly after Atsitsina left, we went outside our tipi to watch the Motokiks. They were already beyond the camp circle, walking in single file from east to west, along the south side of the circle. We saw Mokakin take down a spare lodge pole leaning against the back of his tipi. An offering made of willow sticks, sage grass, and cloth was fastened to the pole. Mokakin had put the offering on the lodge pole before Sunrise, so that Sun could see where it came from. 575 796 782 [824]

The women sat down on the ground outside the south end of camp. Mokakin untied the offering and gave it to his son Charlie, along with a filled pipe and a bunch of sage grass, to bring to the women. Charlie presented these things to one of the members and knelt before her to receive her prayer. Then she lit the pipe and passed it around. After it was smoked out, she returned it to him. The women got up and, single file, moved [276]

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 119-A]
[P. 118A]

manes and tails with a handful of brush, then led them to the river to drink. Presently he brought them back into the open; [he] hobbled one and let it go, led the other back to his lodge, and saddled it. Many other men were saddling their swift animals. They were going out to run buffalo. I prayed to my medicine, to the Above Ones. "Pity me; help me. Let this be the last time that painted lodge man will ride that spotted fast one. Help me to take it and its spotted mate." [726] [782]

Sun was but a little way up in the blue when a hundred or more riders gathered at the lower side of the camp circle. They came down the valley, past us, talking, laughing, singing, happy all of them. And following them were their women, with travois, horses, and packhorses, for bringing in the meat and hides of the killing that was to be made.

I named two to remain on watch, and we others lay down and slept. Came the middle of the day, and we sat up, and the two lay down. I wanted no more sleep that day. I was uneasy. We had dangerous work to do, and my companions looked to me as well as to their own sacred helpers for protection in it. True, my visions had been favorable but I could not be sure that we should not, some of us, get into trouble. I prayed again and again to the Above Ones. I promised Sun that, provided we survived our raid that night, my woman would build for him a sacred lodge. [513] [782]

The day was hot, and we became very thirsty. In going up onto the valley slope to watch the camp, we thought we were to suffer from want of water. We had food, dried meat, but dared not eat of it, for that would make us still more thirsty. Idly we watched the big camp; men visiting one another, sitting out in the shade of the lodges, talking, smoking; women busy tanning robes, and leather; children playing everywhere about. We knew that there were a few women of our own kind down there, women whom the Crows had captured many winters back when a large war [271]

726

untied it, coiled it as I moved on to the horse, and then started leading him to the other one. But slowly; only a step or two at a time. When I had [513] got right in front of the lodge, a sleeper within began dream-talking, not loud, a few words at a time. I didn't like that. People who talk in their sleep wake up. This one might awake, hear the horses moving off, and come out. I was very uneasy. I led the horse still more slowly, and at last came to the other one. I cut his rope at the right length for leading him, and then I went on with the two, backing away from the painted lodge until I could no longer see it, watching the two other lodges as I passed between them. I went out from the camp and at a faster pace to the point of timber. Several of my companions had already arrived there with their takings of horses, and had gone again for more of them. Wolf Plume took charge of mine, and said: "Ha! The two spotted ones. You said, there on the valley slope, that they were yours, and you spoke the truth; they are yours."

"Yes, and now I go to the camp for more of them," I answered.

"Wait. Hear me. Pity me, Sun-Power man," [702] said he. "I have worked for you, carried your medicine things; do pity me. Let me go at least once into this enemy camp and take horses, even one horse. I want to be a warrior. I want to be able to count at least one coup, when, this summer, we build Sun's great lodge."

"Yes, I do pity you," I answered. "When I come again, I will make someone take your place here, and you shall go into the camp with me."

Again I led two horses to the meeting-place, and close following me came Bear Bones with three, making five that he had taken. I asked him to remain there until Wolf Plume could make one entrance into the camp with me. He objected; said that he had not come with me as a servant.

"You were once as is this youth, anxious to

[p.262-8]

angrily talking, saying that the fire-setter should be made to suffer. 787

My father sat down upon his couch, put on his leggings and moccasins. 224 My mother, building up the fire, asked what he would eat: pemmican, broiled ribs, berry soup, or what?

"Nothing. Nothing at all," he almost whispered, lay down, turning his back to us. And sadly, worriedly, we looked at him, and obeying my mother's signs to us went outside and sat at one side of the doorway of the lodge. Foodless, silent, long we sat there. From afar the people stared at us, came not near us. We were very sad.

Sun was near the middle of the blue when my father came out to us. He had not washed, rebraided his hair, nor painted his face with [302] sacred red. Very poor looking he was. "I am going to Lone Walker's [822] lodge to tell of my vision; you better come; sit outside," he said to us. We got up and followed him, sat down close outside the lodge where we could hear all that would be said within.

After a few words with my father, Lone Walker came out and shouted to this and that one of our chiefs and Sun's men to come to him. They soon entered the lodge, and a big crowd of our people surrounded it, also sat down to listen.

Then soon my father began, loudly speaking: "My friends, my [774] vision was powerful. As I slept I, my shadow, went forth upon dis- [513] covery of whatever I might see. It was that, as I was walking in a valley strange to me, a buffalo bull came out from a grove, came toward me, stopped and raised high a right forefoot, making as it were, the sign for peace. So, peace I also signed, and he came on. Soon we met and he said to me: 'I have been looking for you. It is that I must give you warning about something you and your kind are doing that is very wrong. It is that with your *piskans* you are rapidly killing off us buffalo. If you keep on doing it you will soon put an end to the very last ones of us. So this I say: stop using your *piskans* if you would prevent something dreadful happening to all of your kind.'

" 'What would it be, that dreadful thing?' I asked.

" 'I have warned you; I will say no more,' he answered and turned and walked back the way he had come. With that I awoke, my body wet with sweat. I felt that I must at once prove to my vision buffalo